DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 930 CG 019 547

AUTHOR Larner, Mary B.
TITLE Moving Locally and Maintaining Social Networks: A Challenge for Mothers in Sweden and the U.S.
PUB DATE 5 Nov 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations (Dearborn, MI, November 3-7, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Blacks; Cross Cultural Studies; *Family Mobility; Foreign Countries; *Migration; *Mothers; Place of Residence; Population Trends; Relocation; *Residential Patterns; *Social Networks; Whites
IDENTIFIERS *Sweden; *United States

ABSTRACT

The United States is known as a mobile society and recently Sweden has also seen higher rates of mobility. A study was conducted to examine how local residential mobility affects the lives of families in Sweden and in black and white communities in the United States, and to investigate how moving affects social networks. Interviews were conducted with mothers in 413 urban families with a preschool child and follow-up interviews were conducted with 326 of the mothers 3 years later. The United States sample consisted of 53 black and 162 white families in 18 neighborhoods near Syracuse, New York. The Swedish sample consisted of 111 families in Gothenburg and Stockholm. Subjects answered questions about neighborhoods and moves they had made, completed social network lists during the initial interview, and revised lists at the follow-up interview. The results indicated that residential moves were common in all three cultural groups--over one-third of the subjects moved at least once during the 3 years and one-fifth of their network ties were broken. Yet moving and breaking network ties were not closely linked. The effects of different policy environments could be seen in types of moves made by families in each culture. When it came to predicting network change, however, personal characteristics and social preferences were more powerful than macro-social variables. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED276930

Moving Locally and Maintaining Social Networks: A Challenge for Mothers in Sweden and the U.S.

Mary Larner, Ph.D.
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

November 5, 1986

Paper presented at the
Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations
Dearborn, Michigan

CG 019547

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mary B. Larner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Cross-national comparisons are often undertaken to examine policy differences. Problems are defined with broad social indicators and the studies focus on the legislation and support services that address those social problems. When cross-national study is approached from an ecological perspective, however, a wider range of influences is considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). National policies are important because they create a context that shapes family decisions. Decisions and behavior are influenced not only by societal forces, though — cultural traditions and personal psychology also demand consideration. This study examines how local residential mobility affects the lives of families in Sweden and in the Black and White communities in the U.S. Patterns of residential mobility show how different policy environments influence family choices to move. Then I look at how moving affects social networks — an area where cultural and personal factors are salient.

Residential Mobility and Social Networks

The U.S. is known as a mobile society (20% of U.S. households relocate each year; Shumaker and Stokols, 1982) and recently Sweden has also seen high rates of mobility. A residential move can mean many things, though, and those meanings are influenced by social policy. In the U.S., the family's own financial resources determine the quality and security of their housing (Zais, 1983). Continuing racial discrimmination limits the options open to Blacks (Blackwell and Hart, 1982; Fairchild and Tucker, 1982). By contrast, in Sweden, tenant rights are protected, housing standards are high, and housing subsidies are widely available (Swedish Institute, 1981). Rates of mobility are likely to be influenced by family-level variables (life-cycle stage, income, marital status), and by societal variables like housing policy and residential segregation (Rossi and Shlay, 1982).

Social relationships with relatives, neighbors, and friends are important supports, especially for families with young children, providing practical assistance, advice, emotional support, and a sense of belonging (Cochran and Brassard, 1979). Observers in both the U.S. and Sweden worry that mobility is isolating families from social supports and undermining communities. Prominent child development researchers suggest that mobility may contribute to loneliness and depression (Kagan, Klugman and Zigler, 1983), Vance Packard warns us that America has become "a nation of strangers", and a group of Swedish sociologists who studied family life patterns concluded that:

> During the 1960s, geographic mobility was intense in Sweden... Now, during the 1970s, we see the consequences... Local cultures which serve as safety nets and provide social control, social norms, and shared value-systems do not develop. Individualism and familism exact a price in weakened solidarity, indifference toward other people, and insufficient belief in the norms of the community and in the legitimacy of the system. (Bjornberg, 1982).

Others — urban sociologists like Claude Fischer and Barry Wellman — argue against sentimentalism in our notions of community (Fischer, 1979, Wellman, 1979). Modern urban societies made people less dependent on the neighborhood as the sole source of their social ties, drawing friends from a variety of contexts across the city. This non-localism may soften the impact of local moves on people's social lives. Empirical studies have found that, when interviewed, mobile families say they are satisfied with their new communities, they can keep up with their relatives and have readily found new friends and neighbors (Jones, 1973; McAllister et al, 1973). Clearly, they are eager to feel adjusted, but their perception does not tell us how much change they had to adjust to. Objective measures of social involvement have not yet been used to get hard numbers on the extent of social disruption that follows a move.

Methods

The study draws on interviews with mothers in 413 urban families with a preschool child and follow-up interviews with 326 of those families three years later (Cochran et al, 1985). The U.S. sample was drawn from 18 neighborhoods near Syracuse, New York, and in Sweden four neighborhoods were sampled in each of the two major cities (Gothenburg and Stockholm). The longitudinal sample includes 53 U.S. Black, 162 U.S. White, and 111 Swedish families. In addition to answering open-ended questions about neighborhood and any moves they had made, the mothers completed social network lists during the first interview and revised them three years later.

Who Moved?

Residential moves were common in all three cultural groups. Of the 413 original families, well over a third moved at least once in the three years: 56% of the U.S. Black sample, 31% of the U.S. White sample, and 41% of the Swedish families moved (see Table 1). The relative stability of the U.S. Whites reflects the fact that over half of those families owned their own homes, compared with only 12% and 13% of the U.S. Blacks and Swedes. The mobility rate for U.S. White families who rented their housing was a substantial 52% over the three years. The high proportion of Swedish families who moved also comes as a surprise. Swedish policies protecting people from evictions, layoffs, and income instability evidently do not remove the impetus that prompts families to move from place to place.

What lies behind a family's decision to move? Most families move by choice (Michelson, 1980), though a minority of moves are unwanted -- caused by urban renewal, landlord whim, nonpayment of rent, or unacceptable living conditions — and these probably have more negative consequences. Just over half the mobile families had moved to a new neighborhood in the same region,

so they could be found for follow-up interviews (23% moved too far to be traced, and another 21% moved only a few doors away and are not counted among the "mobile" in subsequent analyses). Mothers who had moved locally responded to questions about their reasons for moving and assessment of their new home. Reasons for moving were coded into three categories — moves made under pressure (because of eviction, condemned housing, or unacceptable living conditions), those made for "neutral" reasons (following a change in employment, a marriage or divorce), and those made by choice. The mothers also compared their new housing and neighborhood with those they left behind. Results are presented in Table 2.

Only about a third of the American families reported that they moved because they chose to (32% of the Black and 37% of the White families), as compared with 77% of the Swedes. A similar picture holds for the family's satisfaction with their new situation. A minority of the American movers (between 30 and 40%) felt that their new homes and neighborhoods were better than those they left behind — though Black movers were more positive toward their new housing. The Swedish movers were satisfied with both living conditions and neighborhoods. It seems that the supportive Swedish policy environment may not influence the extent of local mobility, but its protective effects can be seen in the positive character of those moves.

The Impact of Moving on Networks

What consequences do local moves have for the social networks of the movers? This study is one of the first to empirically examine change in the membership of social networks over time. The network interview asks the mother to name the people she knows and has contact with, those "who are important to you in one way or another". Network members include relatives,

neighbors, friends, people known through work and organizations. In the three-year follow-up interview, the mother reviewed her list, removing some names and adding others. The average Time 1 networks included 15 people for U.S. Blacks, 23 for U.S. Whites, and 14 for the Swedes.

To show how moving changes the social network, Figure 1 shows the proportion of the network members (and neighbors) who were dropped from the networks of stable and mobile mothers. Rates of turnover in the network are noticably high, ranging from 19% up to 34% of the entire network membership. These rates are higher still among neighbors — from 34% to a whopping 66% of the Time 1 neighbors are dropped at follow-up three years later. Surprisingly, however, moving significantly increases that turnover only in the U.S. White sample.

The small effect of moving indicates only that the family's <u>own</u> move is not a powerful cause of network change. Moving is only one change that may disrupt relationships — changes in marital or work status also change the basis of social ties. Furthermore, we must not ignore events in the lives of the network members. A social relationship is a two-way street, and a change in the situation of either participant can disrupt the tie for both. Mothers gave reasons for dropping network members, and these were coded to indicate (1) losses caused by a change in the mother's own situation, (2) losses because the other person moved or changed jobs, and (3) more emotional reasons for breaking ties, like decreased compatibility.

Less than one fourth of the broken network ties resulted from a change in the mother's own situation (13% for U.S. Blacks, 18% for U.S. Whites, and 24% for Swedes). Nearly twice as many ties were broken because of events in the network member's life (43% for Blacks, 38% for Whites, and 35% for

Swedes). Even a mother who has not moved herself has to deal with changing social relationships because of the transience of the people around her.

Other Influences on Network Turnover

Finally, regression analyses were conducted to discover which sets of variables best predict the amount of network turnover experienced by mothers in the three cultures. Potential predictors included local residential mobility, characteristics of the mother (age, education, single parent status), and features of her network (size, intensity, and kin dominance). Figure 2 summarizes the results, showing which variables were significant predictors of network change among U.S. Blacks, U.S. Whites, and Swedes.

Among Black mothers, single parent status, high education, and a low-intensity network all predicted high turnover among social relationships. As we saw before, moving was associated with high turnover for White American mothers, along with single parent status, maternal youth, and a low proportion of kin in the network. For Swedish mothers, the only variable significantly related to turnover was the measure of kin-dominance of the network. In search of possible explanations for these patterns, it is useful to consider the context surrounding each group of mothers.

- The U.S. Black families inhabit a world where everyone moves, and mothers appear to hold down turnover in their networks by including only very close ties. Younger and more educated mothers who choose to form looser relationships in the community accept the challenge of often losing and replacing those ties.

- The U.S. White mothers live in widely-contrasting "ecological niches". Some niches are filled with change: young mothers, single parents, and mobile families face (and often accept) high rates of turnover in their

relationships. In contrast, older and two-parent families often their own homes, and the stability of their networks reflects their settled circumstances. U.S. White mothers also find stability by focusing their networks on kin — the most durable social ties.

- The Swedish mothers in this sample were challenged by change in their residences and their networks. However, age, education, marital status did not make a Swedish woman more or less likely to move, or to have a changeable network. Perhaps Sweden's protective social policies leave individuals comparatively free to pursue their goals according to personal timetables. Idiosyncratic choices are not easily explained using sociological research models.

What can we make of these findings? These families lived challenging lives — over 1/3 moved at least once during the three years, and a fifth of their network ties were broken during that time. Yet those two types of change were not closely linked. Not all moves disrupted relationships even with former neighbors, and residential stability was no sure safeguard against network turnover. The type of network a mother had developed influenced turnover as much as any other variable. By focusing their energies on close ties, especially with kinfolk, mothers in all three cultures could minimize transience in their networks. The effects of different policy environments could be seen in types of moves made by families in each culture. When it came to predicting network change, though, personal characteristics (i.e. mother's age) and social preferences (for network types) were more powerful than macro-social variables. The reality of individual lives is inevitably more complex than our generalizations.

References

Bjornberg, U., Back-Wiklund, M., Lindfors, H., and Nilsson, A. Livsformer i en region. Kungalv, Sweden: Liber Allmanna Forlaget, 1982.

Blackwell, J., and Hart, P. Cities, suburbs, and Blacks: A study of concerns, distrust, and alienation. Bayside, NY: General Hall, 1982.

Bronfenbrenner, U. The ecology of human development. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Cochran, M. and Brassard, J. Child development and personal social networks. Child Development, 1979, 50, 601-606.

Cochran, M. and Henderson, C. Family Matters revisited: An evaluation of the parental empowerment process. Final report to the National Institute of Education, 1985. Cornell University.

Fairchild, H. and Tucker, M.B. Black residential mobility: Trends and characteristics. Journal of Social Issues, 1982, 38, 51-74.

Fischer, C., Jackson, R., Steuve, A., Gerson, K., McCallister-Jones, L., with Baldassare, M. Networks and places: Social relations in the urban setting. New York: The Free Press, 1977.

Jones, S. Geographic mobility as seen by the wife and mother. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1973, 10, 210-217.

Kagan, S., Klugman, E., and Zigler, E. Shaping child and family policies: Criteria and strategies for a nemw decade. In E. Zigler, S. Kagan, and E. Klugman (Eds.), Children, families and government: Perspectives on American social policy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

McAllister, R., Butler, E., and Kaiser, E. The adaptation of women to residential mobility. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1973, 10, 197-204.

Michelson, W. Residential mobility and urban policy: Some sociological considerations. In W. Clark and E. Moore (Eds.), Residential mobility and public policy. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980.

Rossi, P. and Shlay, A. Residential mobility and public policy issues: "Why families move" revisited. Journal of Social Issues, 1982, 38.

Shumaker, S. and Stokols, D. Residential mobility as a social issue and research topic. Journal of Social Issues, 1982, 38, 1-19.

Wellman, B. The community question: The intimate networks of East Yorkers. American Journal of Sociology, 1979, 84, 1201-1231.

Zais, J. The housing of families with children: Basic trends. In R. Nelson and F. Skidmore (Eds.), American families and the economy: The high costs of living. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1983.

Table 1

Who Moved? Rates of Residential Mobility in Cultural Groups

	U.S. Black n=78	U.S. White n=207	Swedes n=128	Total n=413
Families who moved				
percent	58%	29%	41%	38%
number	45	61	53	159
Renters who moved				
percent	60%	52%	42%	50%
number	37	47	47	131

Table 2

Character of Local Moves in Cultural Groups

	U.S. Black Local Movers n=22	U.S. White Local Movers n=32	Swedish Local Movers n=31
Why did you move?			
Pressed to move	45%	47%	10%
Neutral reasons	23%	16%	13%
Chose to move	32%	37%	77%
Satisfaction now?			
Better housing than before	59%	38%	58%
Better neighborhood than before	32%	38%	77%

Table 3

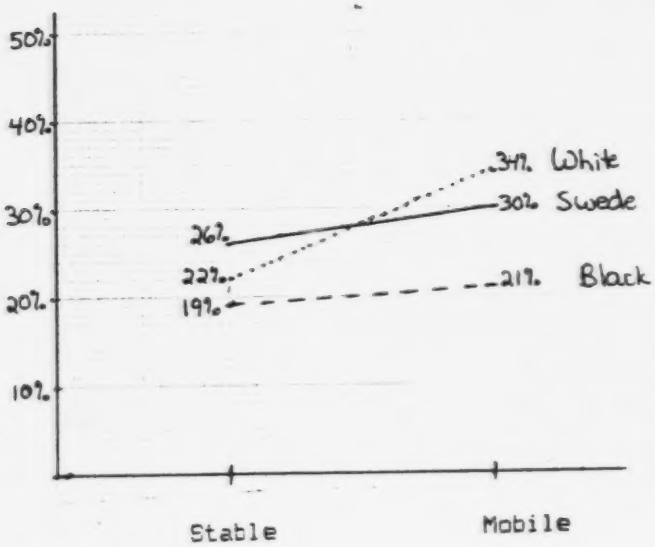
Reasons Given for Dropping Network Ties

	U.S. Black n=53	U.S. White n=162	Swedes n=111
Percent of ties dropped because of:			
Change in own situation	13%	18%	24%
Change in network member's situation	43%	38%	35%
Other reason	44%	44%	41%

Figure 1

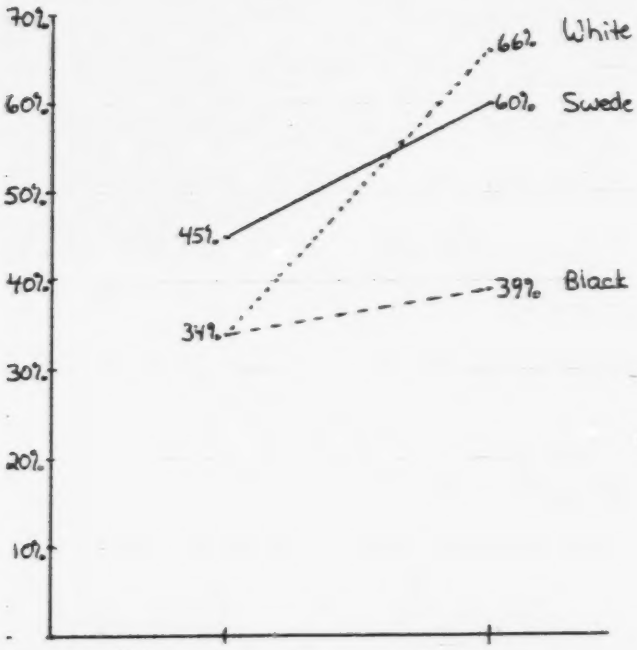
Turnover in the Networks of Stable and Mobile Mothers

All Network Members



	Stable	Mobile
U.S. Black	19%	21%
U.S. White	22%	34%
Swedes	26%	30%

Neighbors in the Network



	Stable	Mobile
U.S. Black	34%	39%
U.S. White	34%	66%
Swedes	45%	60%

Figure 2

Regression Models Predicting Amount of Network Turnover

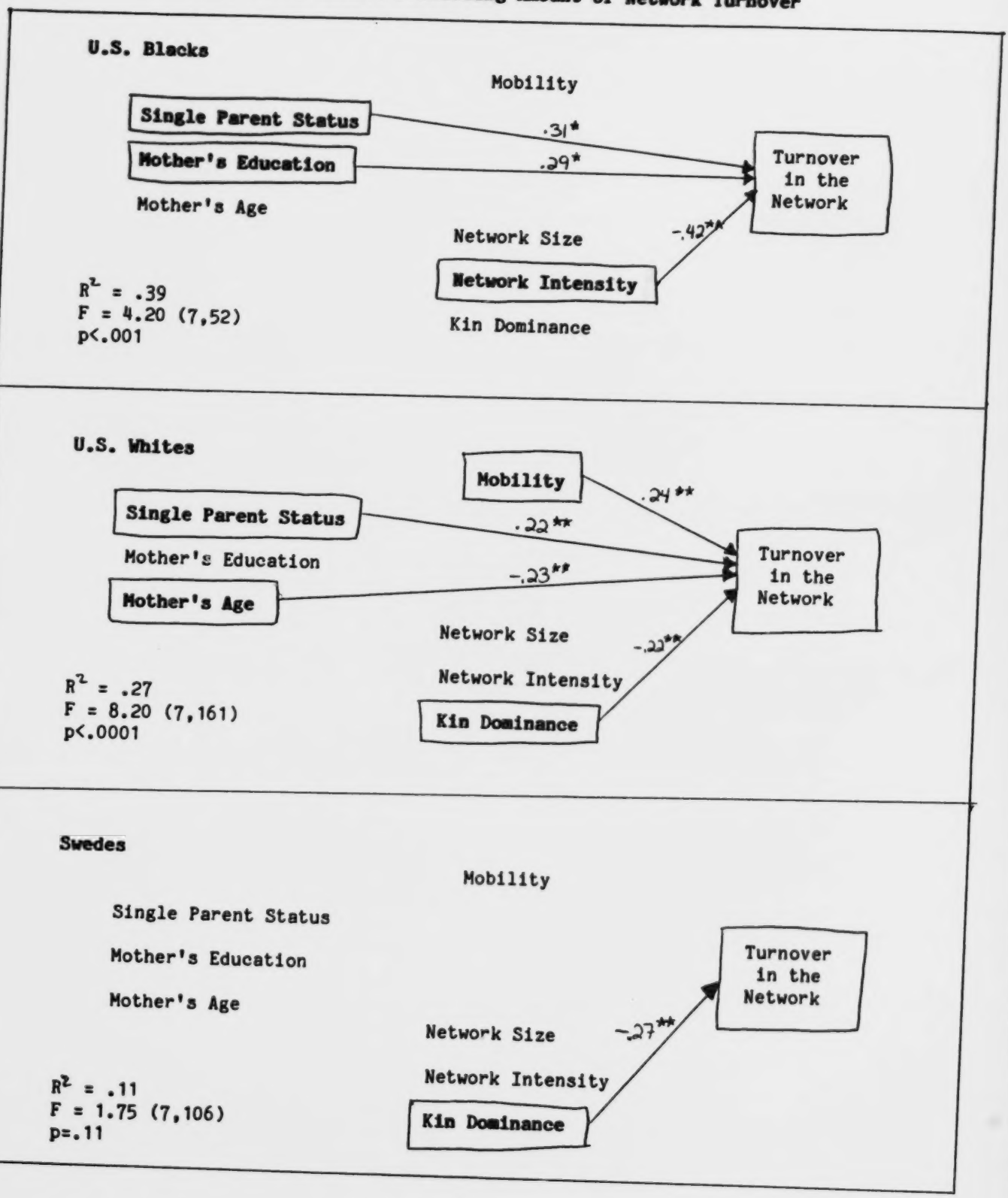


Table 5

Predictors of Network Turnover in Three Cultural Groups
Regression Results

U.S. Blacks

Terms in Model	Partial Correlation	Significant Effects
Moving	-.11	
Two-parent family	-.31 *	Two-parent family *
Mother's age	-.16	
Mother's education	.29 *	Mother's education *
Network size	-.08	
Network intensity	-.42 **	Network intensity **
Kin dominance in network	-.09	

Model: R =.39 F=4.20 (7,52) p<.001

U.S. Whites

Terms in Model	Partial Correlation	Significant Effects
Moving	.24 **	Moving **
Two-parent family	-.22 **	Two-parent family **
Mother's age	-.23 **	Mother's age **
Mother's education	-.01	
Network size	-.08	
Network intensity	.09	
Kin dominance in network	-.22 **	Kin dominance in network **

Model: R =.27 F=8.20 (7,161) p<.0001

Swedes

Terms in Model	Partial Correlation	Significant Effects
Moving	.05	
Two-parent family	-.08	
Mother's age	-.14	
Mother's education	-.04	
Network size	-.08	
Network intensity	-.09	
Kin dominance in network	-.27 **	Kin dominance in network **

Model: R =.11 F=1.75 (7,106) p=.11